

THE LAW OF GOD AND THE STATUTES OF MEN.

A

S E R M O N ,

PREACHED AT

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S E R M O N .

“THOU SHALT WORSHIP THE LORD, THY GOD, AND HIM ONLY SHALT THOU SERVE.”—*Matthew* iv. 10.

Last Sunday I spoke of Trust in God, endeavoring to show that it involved an absolute confidence in the Purposes of God, and an absolute confidence in the Means thereunto, and consequently the practical Use thereof.

There is a matter of very great consequence connected herewith, namely this, — the Relation between a man's Religion and his Allegiance to the Church and the State. So this morning I ask your attention to a Sermon of our Duty to the Laws of God, and our Obligation to the Statutes of Men. It is a theme I have often spoken of; and what I shall say this morning may be regarded as occasional, and supplementary to the much that I have said, and printed, likewise, before.

In its primitive form, Religion is a mere Emotion; it is nothing but a feeling; an instinctive feeling; at first vague, shadowy, dim. In its secondary stage it is also a

a Thought; the emotion has travelled from the heart upwards to the head. It is an Idea, an abstract idea, the Object whereof transcends both time and space, and is not cognizable by any sense. But finally, in its ultimate form, it becomes likewise an Act. Thus it spreads over all a man's life, inward and outward too; it goes up to the tallest heights of the philosopher's speculation, down to the lowest deeps of human consciousness; it reaches to the minute details of our daily practice. Thus Religion wraps all our life in its own wide mantle. So the sun, ninety-six million miles away, comes every morning and folds in its warm embrace each great and every little thing on the round world. Religion takes note of the private conduct of the individual man, and the vast public concerns of the greatest nation and the whole race of mankind.

It is eminently connected with the Creeds and the Statutes of the people, wherein the nation comes to the consciousness of itself, and of its duty. To comprehend the relation which religion bears to these creeds and statutes, let us look at the matter a little more narrowly, going somewhat in detail; and to understand it the more completely, let us go back to the first principles of things.

There is a God of Infinite Perfection, who acts as perfect Cause and perfect Providence of all things,—making the Universe from a perfect motive, of perfect material, for a perfect purpose, and as a perfect means

therunto. Of course, if the Universe be thus made, there must be power and force enough, of the right kind, in it to accomplish the purposes of God ; and this must be true of both parts of the Universe,—the World of Matter, and the World of Man. Else, God is not a perfect Cause and Providence, and has not made the Universe from a perfect motive, of perfect material, for a perfect purpose, and as a perfect means thereto.

Now, there are certain natural modes of operation of these forces and powers which God has put in the Universe ; the natural powers of matter and of man are meant to act in a certain way, and not otherwise. These modes of operation I will call Laws, Natural Laws ; they exist in the material world and in the human world. They are a part of the Universe. These Laws must be observed and kept as means to the end that is proposed.

In the World of Matter these Laws are always kept, for the Actual of Nature and the Ideal of Nature are identical ; they are just the same. When this leaf which I drop falls from my hand, it falls by the Law which the Infinite God meant it should fall by, and keeps that exactly. In Nature—the world of matter—this always takes place, and the Actual of to-day is the Ideal of eternity,—for there everything is accomplished with no finite, private, individual will ; all is mechanism, the brute, involuntary, unconscious action of matter passively obedient to the mind and will of God. There God is the

only Actor; all else is tool; He is the only Workman; Nature is all engine and God the Engineer. Accordingly, in the world of matter there is a harmony of forces; but not a harmony of purpose, of will, of thought, of feeling,—because there is only one purpose, will, thought, feeling. God alone is the consciousness of the material world; matter obeys his Laws, but wills not, knows not. The ideal of Nature resides in God's consciousness; only its actual in itself. The two are one; but the material things do not *know* of that oneness; God only knows thereof. Nature knows nothing of God, nothing of his laws, nothing of itself;—because therein God is the only Cause, the only Providence, the only Consciousness.

On the other hand, in the Human World, man is an actor as well as a tool; he is in part engine, in part also engineer. The ideal of man's conduct, character and destination, resides in God; but thence it is transferred to the mind of man by man's own instinct and reflection; and it is to become actual by man's thought, man's will, man's work. The human race comes to consciousness in itself, and not merely to consciousness in God. So in virtue of the superior nature and destination of man, between him and God there is to be not merely a harmony of forces, but a harmony of feeling, thought, will, purpose, and thence of act. Man is to obey the natural Laws as completely as that leaf obeyed them, falling from my hand. But, unlike the

leaf, man is to *know* that he obeys ; he must will to obey. So he is to form in his own mind an ideal of the character which he should attain, of the conduct which he would observe, and then by his own will he is to make that ideal his actual. This is the dignity of man,—he is partial cause and providence of his own affairs

In general, man has powers sufficient to find out the natural mode of operation of all his human forces, all the natural Laws of his conduct, his natural ideal. Narrow this down to a small compass, and take one portion of these powers,—the Moral Part of man, and thereof this only,—that portion which relates to his dealing with his fellow-men.

There is a moral faculty called Conscience. Its function is to inform us of the Moral Ideal ; to transfer it from God's mind to our mind ; to inform us what are the natural modes of operation, the rules of conduct in our relation with other men. Conscience does this in two ways.

First, by Instinctive moral action. Here conscience acts spontaneously and anticipates experience, acts in advance of history, and spontaneously projects an ideal which is derived from the moral instinct of our nature. This is the transcendent way of learning the moral Law. And let me add, it is the favorite way of young and enthusiastic persons ; the favorite way, likewise, of meditative and contemplative men, who dwell apart from mankind, and look at Ideas which are the causes

of action more than at the immediate or ultimate effect of special measures.

The other way is by Reflective moral action. Here we learn the moral Laws by experiment ; by observation, trial, experience, we find out what suits the conscience of the individual and the conscience of mankind. This is the inductive way, and it is the favorite mode of the the great mass of men, of practical men who live in the midst of affairs.

Each of these methods has its advantage, both their special limitations and defects. We require both of these,—the process of moral instinct which shoots forward and forecasts the ideal, and the process of moral induction which comes carefully afterwards and studies the facts and sees what conduct squares with conscience, and how it looks after the act has been done as well as before.

In these two ways we learn the natural mode of operation and the natural rules of conduct which suit our moral nature ; that is, we discover the Moral Laws which are writ in the nature and constitution of man, and are thence historically made known in the consciousness of man.

When they are understood, we see that they are the Laws of God, a part of the Universe, a part of the purpose of God, a part of the means which God has provided for accomplishing his purpose.

These laws are not of man's making, but of his finding made. He no more makes them than the blacksmith makes the heaviness of his iron, or the astronomer makes the moon eclipse the sun. A man may heed these laws, or heed them not; make them, or unmake them, — that is beyond his power.

Neither the individual nor the race acquires a consciousness of these Moral Laws all at once. It is done progressively by you and me; progressively by the human race, learning here a little, and there a little. The natural moral ideal is not all at once transferred from God's Mind to man's. We learn the Laws of our moral nature like the Laws of matter, slowly, little by little. A good man is constantly making progress in the knowledge of God's natural Moral Laws; mankind does the same. The race to-day knows more of the natural Moral Laws of our constitution than the human race ever knew before. A thousand years hence no doubt, mankind will know a great deal more of this natural moral ideal than we know to-day. Accordingly, speaking after the events of history, the Moral Ideal of mankind is continually rising. It may not be always rising in the same man, who goes on for a while, then becomes idle, or old, or wicked, and goes down. It may not always be rising in the same nation; that also advances for a while, then sins against God sometimes, and goes down to ruin. But, take the human race as a whole, the moral ideal of mankind is constantly rising higher and higher.

The next thing is to obey these Laws, consciously, knowing we obey them ; voluntarily, willing to obey, and make the moral ideal the actual of life for the individual and the race. This also is done progressively ; not all at once, but by slow degrees. The Moral Actual of the human race is constantly rising higher and higher. Just in proportion as the ideal shoots up the actual follows after it, though on slow and laborious wings. If you look microscopically, at the condition of mankind at intervals of only a hundred years, you will see that there is a moral progress from century to century ; but separate your points of observation by a thousand years instead of a century, the moral progress of the race is so obvious that no unprejudiced man can fail to see it when he opens his natural eyes and looks. I will not say it is so with every special nation, for a nation may go back as well as forward ; but it is so with the human race as a whole, so with mankind.

Religion—which begins in feeling, proceeds to thought, and thence to action, — in its highest form is the keeping of all the Laws which God writ in the constitution of man : in other words, it is the service of God by the normal use, discipline, development, enjoyment and delight of every limb of the body, every faculty of the spirit, every power which we possess over matter or over mankind, — each in its due proportion, all in their complete harmony. That is the whole and complete religion.

Now leaving out of sight for a moment the matter of mere sentiment, in religion reducing itself to practice there are two things, — to wit, first, Intellectual Ideas, doctrines of the mind, things to be believed ; secondly, Moral Duties, doctrines of the conscience, things to be done. Each man in his private individual capacity, as Edwin or Richard, has his own intellectual ideas, things to be believed, his own moral duties, things to be done. To be faithful to himself he must believe the one and must do the other. It is a part of his personal religion to believe the truths which he knows, to do the duties that he acknowledges.

But man is social as well as solitary. So men, in their collective capacity as churches, towns, nations, come to the conclusion that they have certain intellectual ideas which ought to be believed, certain moral duties which ought to be done. As an expression of this fact, men assembling in bodies for purposes called religious, as churches, make up a collection of ideas connected with religion, which are deemed true. They call this a Creed. It is a collection of things to be believed, and so it is also a rule of intellectual conduct in matters pertaining to religion.

They likewise assemble in bodies for a purpose more directly practical, as towns, as nations, and make a collection of duties which are deemed obligatory. They call this collection of duties a Constitution or a Code of Statutes.

I will use the word statute to mean what is commonly called a law, made by men: that is to say a rule of practical conduct devised by men in authority. I keep the word Law to describe the natural mode of operation which God wrote in the constitution of material or human nature, and the word Statute for that rule of conduct which man makes and adds thereunto.

This is a legitimate aim in making the Creed, — to preserve all known religious truth, and diffuse it amongst men. But it is not legitimate to aim at hindering the attainment of new religious truth, or to hinder efforts for the attainment of new religious truth.

This is a legitimate aim in making the Statutes, — to preserve all known moral duty, and diffuse it amongst men; and thereby secure to each man the enjoyment of all his natural rights, so that he may act according to the natural mode of operation of his powers. But it is not legitimate to hinder the attainment of new moral duty, or efforts after that. The creed should aim at Truth, all truth, and should be a step towards it. The statutes should aim at Justice, all justice, to ensure all the rights of all, and should be a step in that direction, not away from it.

Both the creeds and statutes may be made as follows:

First, they may be made by men who are far before the people, men who get sight of truths and duties in

advance of mankind. Then these men set to mankind a hard lesson, but one that is profitable for instruction, for doctrine, for reproof, that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished to every good work. In such cases the creed or statute is educational ; it is prepared for the pupil, set by a master.

Or, secondly, these creeds and statutes may be made by men who are just on a level with the average of the people. Then they are simply expressional of the moral character and attainments of the average men. They are educational to the hindmost, expressional to the middlemost, and merely protectional to the foremost, — of no service as helping them forward, only as protecting them from being disturbed, interrupted and so drawn backwards by those who are behind.

Or, thirdly, these creeds and statutes may be made by crafty men who are below the moral average of the people ; made not as steps towards truth and justice, but as means for the private personal ambition of such as make the statutes or the creeds ; by men who are endowed with force of body, and rule over our flesh by violence, or with force of cunning, and rule over our minds by sophistry and fraud. In this case the creed or statute is a step backwards, aims not at truth and justice, but at falsehood and wrong, and is simply debasing, — debasing to the mind and conscience. Here it is not a teacher giving lessons to the pupil ; it is not a pupil undertaking to set a lesson to another who knows as much as he does ;

it is a scoundrel setting a lesson of wickedness to the saint and the sinner.

Laws may be made in any one of these three ways, and no more ; the categories are exhaustive.

Now see the relation of each individual man to the Creed of his Nation or Church. By his moral nature man is bound to believe what to him appears true. His mind demands it as intellectual duty, his conscience demands it as moral duty ; it is a part of his religion ; faithfulness to himself requires this.

But he is likewise morally bound to reject everything that to him seems false. He can close his mind and not think about the matter at all, and so he may seem to believe when he does not ; or he can actually think the other way and lie about it and pretend to believe. But if he is faithful, he must believe what to him seems true, and must reject what to him seems untrue.

If a man does this, the public creed of the people or church may be a help to him, because while it embodies both the truths that men know, and the errors which they likewise suppose to be true, he accepts from the creed what he deems true and rejects what he deems false. The false that he rejects, harms him not ; the true which he accepts is a blessing. But there is this trouble,—the priest, who has made, invented or imported the creed, claims jurisdiction over the minds of men and bids the philosopher “Accept our creed.”

“No!” answers the philosopher, “I cannot! my reason forbids.” “Then, down with your reason!” thunders the priest, “there is no truth above our creed! The priest and creed are not amenable to reason; reason is amenable to them!” What shall be done? Shall the philosopher submit, and seem to believe? Shall he think the other way, and yet pretend to believe, and lie? or shall he openly and unhesitatingly reject what seems false? Ask these prophets of the Old Testament what we shall do! ask Socrates, Anaxagoras, Paul, Luther, Jesus! ask the Puritans of England, the Huguenots of France, the Covenanters of Scotland, which we shall do! whether we shall count human Reason amenable to the priest, or the priest amenable to human Reason. Sometimes a whole nation violates its mind and submits to the priest’s creed. The many mainly give up thinking all together, — they can do it and have done it; the few think, but lie outwardly, pretending belief. Then there comes the intellectual death of the nation; the people are cut off from new accessions of truth, and intellectually they die out. “Where there is no vision the people perish,” says the Old Testament; and there is not a word in the Bible that is more true. Tear a rose-bush from the ground and suspend it in the air, will it live? Just as much will man’s mind live when plucked away from contact with Truth. Do you want historic examples? Look at Mahometan countries compared with Christian. Whilst the Koran was in advance of the

Mahometans there was a progress in the nations which accepted it. There arose great men. But now when men have lived up to the Koran, and are forbidden to think further, science dies out, all original literature disappears, there is no great spiritual growth. In the whole Mahometan world this day, there is not a single man eminent for science or literature; not a great Mahometan orator, poet or statesman, amongst all the many millions of Mahometans on the round world. Look at a Catholic in comparison with a Protestant country. Compare Catholic Spain, Portugal, Italy, with England, Scotland, Germany, noble Protestant countries, and see the odds. In the Catholic countries the priest has laid himself down at the foot of the tree, and says, "Root into me, and you shall have life." Compare Catholic Brazil with Protestant New England. Nay, in New England, go into the families of private men, families where bigotry of the various denominations, Unitarian as well as Trinitarian,—for there is a "Unitarian" bigotry,—has put its cold, hard hand, and forbidden freedom of thought;—compare the children born and bred there with such as are born and bred in families where freedom of thought is not only tolerated but encouraged, and see the difference. The foremost men of this country in science, literature, statesmanship, are men who have spurned that Pharisaic meanness, which chains a man's mind and fetters his conscience.

It is as important to accumulate the thoughts of many men, as to consolidate their property for building a railroad, a factory, or a town. No single man is so rich as the whole people of Massachusetts ; and though before all other in some speciality, no one man is so rich in thought as mankind. To aggregate the knowledge of a hundred men, each mastering some special subject, is of great value ; it embodies the result of very much thinking, which may be thus hoarded up for future use. That is a good thing ; and as each truth is a source of power, it quickens other men and helps them to think. Such is the effect of the scientific associations of Christendom, from the Boston Society of Natural History, to the French Academy,—perhaps the most learned and accomplished body of men on earth. That is a legitimate function of bodies of men coming together, each dropping his special wisdom into the human chest, for the advantage of the whole.

But on the other hand, the consolidation of the opinions of men who are not seeking for truth to liberate mankind, but for means to enthrall us withal, will embody falsehood and also retard the progress of mankind by hindering free thought. This will be the result wherever the actual creed is taken for total, — embracing all truth now known ; as final, — embracing all truth that is to be known ; and as unquestionable, the ultimate standard of Truth.

I just said there was not a single eminent man of science or letters in any Mahometan country ; not a great scholar, philosopher, or historian. Yet there is talent enough born into Mahometan countries, — as much as in Christian nations of the same race ; but it has not opportunity for development ; the young Hercules is choked in his cradle. Look at the Catholics of the United States in comparison with the Protestants. In the whole of America there is not a single man born and bred a Catholic distinguished for anything but his devotion to the Catholic Church : I mean to say there is not a man in America born and bred a Catholic, who has any distinction in science, literature, politics, benevolence or philanthropy. I do not know one ; I never heard of a great philosopher, naturalist, historian, orator or poet amongst them. The Jesuits have been in existence three hundred years ; they have had their pick of the choicest intellect of all Europe, — they never take a common man when they know it, — they subject every pupil to a severe ordeal, intellectual and physical, as well as moral, in order to ascertain whether he has the requisite stuff in him to make a strong Jesuit out of. They have a scheme of education masterly in its way. But there has not been a single great original man produced in the company of Jesuits from 1545 to 1854. They absorb talent enough but they strangle it. Clipped oaks never grow large. Prune the roots of a tree with a spade, prune the branches close to the bole, what becomes of the tree ? The bole itself remains thin and

scant and slender. Can a man be a conventional dwarf and a natural giant at the same time? Case your little boy's limbs in metal, would they grow? Plant a chestnut in a tea-cup, do you get a tree? Not a shrub even. Put a priest, or a priest's creed as the only soil for a man to grow in; he grows not. The great God provided the natural mode of operation:—do you suppose He will turn aside and mend or mar the Universe at your or my request? I think God will do no such thing.

Now see the relation of the individual to the Statutes of men. There is a natural duty to obey every statute which is just. It is so before the thing becomes a statute. The legislator makes a decree; it is a declaration that certain things must be done, or certain other things not done. If the things commanded are just, the statute does not make them just; does not make them any more morally obligatory than they were before. The legislator may make it very uncomfortable for me to disobey his command, when that is wicked; he cannot make it *right* for me to keep it when wicked. All the moral obligation depends on the justice of the statute, not on its legality; not on its constitutionality; but, on the fact that it is a part of the natural Law of God, the natural mode of operation of man. The statute no more makes it a moral duty to love men and not hate them, than the multiplication table makes twice two four: the multiplication table declares it; it does not make it. If a statute announces, "Thou shalt hate thy neighbor, not love him," it does

not change the duty, more than the multiplication table would alter the fact if it should declare that twice two is three. Geometry proves that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles : it does not make the equality between the two.

Now then, as it is a moral duty to obey a just statute because it is just, so it is a moral duty to disobey any statute which is unjust. If the statute squares with the Law of God, if the constitution of Morocco corresponds with the Constitution of the Universe, which God writ in my heart, — then I am to keep the constitution of Morocco ; if not, disobey it, as a matter of conscience.

Here in disobedience, there are two degrees. First, there is passive disobedience, non-obedience, the doing nothing for the statute ; and second, there is active disobedience, which is resistance, the doing something, not for the statute, but something against it. Sometimes the moral duty is accomplished by the passive disobedience, doing nothing ; sometimes, to accomplish the moral duty, it is requisite to resist, to do something against the statute. However, we are to resist wrong by right, not wrong by wrong.

There are many statutes which relate mainly to matters of convenience. They are rules of public conduct indeed, but only rules of prudence, not of morals. Such are the statutes declaring that a man shall not vote till twenty-one ; that he shall drive his team on the right hand side of the street ; that he may take six per cent. per annum as interest, and not sixty ; that he may catch

alewives in Taunton River on Fridays, and not on Thursdays or Saturdays. It is necessary that there should be such rules of prudence as these ; and while they do not offend the conscience every good man will respect them ; it is not immoral to keep them.

The intellectual value of a creed is that while it embodies truth it also represents the free thought of the believer who has come to that conclusion, either by himself alone, or as he has been voluntarily helped thitherward by some person who knows better than he. In that case his creed is the monument of the man's progress, and is the basis for future progress. It is to him, in that stage of his growth, the right rule of intellectual conduct. But when the creed is forced on the man, and he pretends to believe and believes not, or only tacitly assents, not having thought enough to deny it, — then it debases and enslaves the man.

So the moral value of a statute is, that while it embodies justice it also represents the free conscience of the nation. Then also it is a monument of the nation's moral progress, showing how far it has got on. It is likewise a basis for future progress, being a right rule for moral conduct. But when the statute only embodies injustice, and so violates the conscience, and is forced on men by bayonets, then its moral value is all gone ; it is against the conscience. If the people consent to suffer it, it is because they are weak ; and if they consent to obey it, it is because they are also wicked.

When the foremost moral men make a statute in ad-

vance of the people, and then attempt to enforce that law against the consent of the majority of the people, it is an effort in the right direction and is educational ; then I suppose the best men will try to execute the law, and will appeal to the best motives in the rest of men. But even here, if ever this is attempted, it should always be done with the greatest caution, lest the leader should go too fast for his followers, undertaking to drag the nation instead of leading them. You may drag dead oxen, drive living oxen ; but a nation is not to be dragged, not to be driven, even in the right direction ; it is to be led. A grown father, six feet high, does not walk five miles the hour with his child two years old ; if he does, he must drag his boy ; if he wants to lead him he must go by slow and careful steps, now and then taking him over the rough places in his arms. That must be done when the law-maker is very far in advance of the people ; he must lead them gently to the right end.

But when a wicked statute is made by the hindmost men in morals, men far in the rear of the average of the people, and urging them in the wrong direction ; when the statute offends the conscience of the people, and the rulers undertake by violence to enforce the statute, then it can be only mean men who will desire its execution, and they must appeal to the lowest motives which animate mean men, and will thus debase the people further and further.

The priest makes a creed against the mind of the people, and says, "There is no truth above my creed !

Down with your reason ! it asks terrible questions." So the Catholic is always taught by authority. The priest does not aim to convince the reason ; not at all ! He says to the philosophers, " This is the doctrine of the church. It is a true doctrine, but you must believe it, not because it is true,—you have no right to ask questions,—but because the church says so." The tyrant makes a statute, and says, " There is no Law above this." The subject is not to ask, " Is the statute right ? does it conform to the Constitution of the Universe, to God's will reflected in my conscience ? " He is only to inquire, " Is it a statute law ? what does the judge say ? There is no Higher Law. "

That is the doctrine which is taught to-day in almost every political newspaper in this country, Whig and Democratic ; and in many of the theological newspapers. But the theological newspapers do not teach it as a Principle and all at once ; they teach it in detail, as a Measure, telling us that this or that particular statute is to be observed, say conscience what it may. It is assumed that the legislator is not amenable to the rules of natural justice. He is only checked by the constitution of the land, not the Constitution of the Universe.

See how the principle once worked. Pharaoh made a statute that all the new-born boys of Hebrew parentage should be killed as soon as they were born. That was the statute ; and instructions were given to the nurses, " If it be a son, then ye shall kill him." Did it become the moral duty of Nurse Shiprah and Nurse Puah to

drown every new-born Hebrew baby in the River Nile? Was it the moral duty of Amram and Jochebed to allow Moses to be killed? It is only a legitimate application of the principle laid down by "the highest authorities" in America,—what are called the highest, though I reckon them among the lowest.

King Darius forbade prayer to any God or man except himself. Should the worshippers of Jehovah hold back their prayer to the Creator? Daniel was of rather a different opinion. A few years ago a minister of a "prominent church" in this city was told of another minister who had exhorted persons to disobey the Fugitive Slave Bill, because it was contrary to the Law of God and the principles of Right. "What do you think of it?" said the questioner, who was a woman, to the Doctor of Divinity. "Very bad!" replied he, "this minister ought to keep the statute, and he should not advise men to disobey it." "But," said the good woman, "Daniel, we are told, when the law was otherwise, prayed to the Lord! prayed right out loud three times a day, with his window wide open! Did he do right or wrong? Would not you have done the same?" The minister said, "If I had lived in those times,—I think, I should—have shut my window." There was no Higher Law!

King Herod ordered all the young children in Bethlehem to be slain. Was it right for the magistrates to execute the order? for the Justices of the Peace to kill the babies? for the fathers and mothers to do nothing

against the massacre of those innocents? The person who wrote the account of it seems to have been of rather a different opinion.

King Henry the Eighth of England, ordered that no man should read the English Bible. Reading the Bible in the Kingdom was made a felony, — punishable with death, without benefit of clergy. Was it the duty of Dr. Franklin's humble fathers to refuse to read their Bibles? They did read them, and your fathers and mine also, I trust. King Pharaoh, Darius, Herod, Henry the Eighth, could not make a wrong thing right. If a mechanic puts his wheel on the upper side of the dam, do you suppose the Merrimack is going to run up into New Hampshire to turn his mill? Just as soon as the great God will undo his own moral work to accommodate a foolish and wicked legislator.

Suppose it was not the king, a one-headed legislator, but the majority of the nation, a legislator with many heads, who made the statutes, would that alter the case? Once, when France was democratic, the democracy ordered the butchery of thousands of men and women. Was it a moral duty to massacre the people?

I know very well it is commonly taught that it is the moral duty of the officers of government to execute every statute, and of the people to submit thereto, no matter how wicked the statute may be. This is the doctrine of the Supreme Court of the United States of America, of the Executive of the United States; I know very well it is the doctrine of the majority of the

Legislature in both Houses of Congress ; it is the doctrine of the churches of Commerce ;— God be praised, it is not the doctrine of the churches of Christianity, and there are such in every denomination, in many a town ; even in the great centers of commerce there are ministers of many denominations, earnest, faithful men, who swear openly that they will keep God's Law, come what will of man's statute. This is practical piety ; the opposite is practical atheism. I have known some speculative atheists. I abhor their doctrines ; but the speculative atheists that I have known, all recognize a Law higher than men's passions and calculations ; the Law of some Power which makes the Universe and sways it for noble purposes and to a blessed end.

Then comes the doctrine :— while the statute is on the books it must be enforced. It is not only the right of the legislator to make any constitutional statute he pleases, but it is the moral and religious duty of the magistrate to enforce the statute ; it is the duty of the people to obey. So in Pharaoh's time it was a moral duty to drown the babies in the Nile ; in Darius' time to pray to King Darius, and him only ; in Herod's time to massacre the children of Bethlehem ; in Henry the Eighth's time to cast your Bible to the flames. Iscariot only did a disagreeable duty.

It is a most dreadful doctrine ; utterly false ! Has a legislator, Pharaoh, Darius, Herod, Henry the Eighth, a single tyrant, any moral right to repudiate God, and declare himself not amenable to the moral Law of the

Universe? You all answer, No! Have ten millions of men out of nineteen millions in America a right to do this? Has any man a moral right to repudiate justice and declare himself not amenable to conscience and to God? Where did he get the right to invade the conscience of mankind? Is it because he is legislator, magistrate, governor, president, king?

Suppose all the voluptuaries of America held a congress of lewdness at New Orleans, and said, "There is no Law higher than the brute instinctive passion of lust in men,"—then would the pimps and bawds and lechers have the moral right to repudiate conscience and crush purity out of the nation?

Imagine that all the misers and sharpers and cheats held a convention of avarice at New York or Boston, and made statutes accordingly, declaring "There is no Law higher than covetousness,"—would they have the moral right to lie and steal and cheat, and "crush out" all the honest men?

Fancy all the ruffians and man-killers assembled in San Francisco,—it would be a fit place, for there were twelve hundred murders committed there in less than four years,—held a convention of violence, and sought to organize murder, and declared, "There is no Law higher than the might of the lifted arm,"—would they have the moral right to kill, stab, butcher whomsoever they pleased?

But that is supposing all this wickedness done without the form of an elected legislature. Then suppose the actual legislatures of the nation should revise the Consti-

tution and delegate the power to those persons to do that work and make statutes for the protection of lewdness, fraud and butchery, — would it then be the moral duty of the rulers to enforce those statutes ; and of the people to submit ? Just as much as it is the moral duty of men to enforce any wicked statute made under the present Constitution of the United States and by the present legislators. The principle is false. It is only justified on the idea that there is no God, and this world is a chaos. But yet it is taught ; and only last Sunday the minister of a “ prominent church ” taught that every law must be executed, right or wrong, and thanked the soldiers who, with their bayonets, forced an innocent man to slavery. No matter how unjust a statute is, it must be enforced and obeyed so long as it is on the Law Book !

Human law in general is a useful and indispensable instrument ; but because a special statute is made for injustice, is it to be used for injustice ? Massachusetts has some thousands of muskets in the arsenal at Cambridge ; but because they were made to shoot with, shall I take them to kill my neighbors ; shall the governor order the soldiers to shoot down the citizens ? It is no worse to do injustice with a gun than to do injustice with a statute. It is not merely the means by which the wicked end is reached that is wicked, it is the end itself ; and if the means is a thing otherwise good, the wicked end makes its use atrocious. What is the statute in the one case but a tool, and the gun a tool in the other case ? The instrument is not to be blamed, and the gun is no

more to be used for a wicked purpose than the statute ; a State statute no more than a State gun. Medicine is a very useful thing. But will you, therefore, go into an apothecary's shop and take his drugs at random ? If you are killed by a poison it is no better because called 'medicine.'

But the notion that every statute must be enforced is historically false. Who enforces the Sunday-law in Massachusetts ? Every daily newspaper you will read to-morrow morning violates the statutes of Massachusetts to-day. It would not be possible to enforce them. Of all the millions of bank capital in Massachusetts, within twelve months, every dollar has violated the statute against Usury. Nobody enforces these acts. Half the statutes of New England are but sleeping lions to wait for the call of the people ; nobody wakes them up every day. Some have been so long fast asleep that they are dead.

When the nation will accept every creed which the priest makes, because it is made for them, then they are tools for the priest, intellectually dead ; and they are fit to have Catholic tyrants rule over them in the church. When the nation is willing to accept a statute which violates the nation's conscience, the nation is rotten. If a statute is right, I will ask how I can best obey it. When it is wrong, I will ask how I can best disobey it,—most safely, most effectually, with the least violence. When we make the priest the keeper of our creed, the State the master of our conscience, then it is all over with us.

Sometimes a great deal of sophistry is used to deceive the consciences of men and make them think a wicked law is just and right. There are two modes of procedure for reaching this end.

One is to weaken the man's confidence in his own moral perceptions by debasing human nature, declaring that conscience is a "most uncertain guide for the individual," and showing that all manner of follies and even wickedness have been perpetrated in its name. So all manner of follies have been taught in the name of Reason, and foolish undertakings have been set a going by prudent and practical men. But is that sufficient argument for refusing to trust the science of the philosopher and the common sense of practical men?

The other way is to pretend that the obnoxious statute is "consistent with morality and religion." Thus the most wicked acts have been announced in the name of God. The Catholics claimed divine authority for the Inquisition; the Carthaginians alleged the command of God as authority for sacrificing children to Melkarte. In the Law Library at Cambridge, a copy of the English Bible in Folio was once the first book in the collection; a Professor then used often to point to the Bible and say, "That is the foundation of the law. It all rests on the word of God!" So every wicked statute, each "ungodly custom become a law," had divine authority! The same experiment is often tried with the fugitive slave bill—it is declared "divine," having "the sanction of the Law, the Prophets and the Gospel."

With these two poisons do men corrupt the public fountains of morality !

Religion is the only basis for everything. It must go everywhere, into the man's shop, into the seamstress' work-room, must steer the sailor's ship. Reverence for the Infinite Mind, and Conscience, and Heart, and Soul, who is Cause and Providence of this world, — that must go up to the highest heights of our speculation, down to the lowest deeps of our practice. Take that away, and there is nothing on which you can depend, even for your money ; or for your liberty and life. Without a reverence for the Higher Law of God every thing will be ruled by interest or violence. The Church will collapse into nothing, the State will go down to ruin !

All around us are monuments of men who, in the name of Truth broke the priest's creed, defied the king's statute in the spirit of Justice. Look at them ! There is a little one at Acton where two men gave their lives for their country ; another at Concord ; one at Lexington, — a little pile of dear old mossy stone, " Sacred to Liberty and the Rights of Mankind ; " another at West Cambridge ; another at Danvers, — all commemorative of the same deed ; and on yonder hill there is a great stone finger pointing to God's Higher Law, and casting its shadow on the shame of the two sister cities. All New England is a monument to the memory of those men who trusted God's Higher Law, and for its sake put an ocean three thousand miles wide between them and

their mothers' bones. It is this which makes Plymouth Rock so dear. Our calendar is dotted all over with days sacred to the memory of such men. What are the First of August, the Twenty-second of December, the Nineteenth of April, the Seventeenth of June, the Fourth of July, but bright, red-letter days in our calendar, marked by the memory of men who were faithful to God, say the statutes of tyrants what they may say? Nay, what else are these venerable days, called Christmas, Easter, Pentecost and the Catholic Saints' days throughout the Christian year?

There is one thing which this Bible teaches in almost every page, and that is reverence for the Higher Law of God. The greatest men who wrote here were only men; to err is human, we all learn by experiment, and they were mistaken in many things; but all teach this, from the littlest to the greatest, from Genesis to Revelation, — RELIGION BEFORE ALL OTHER THINGS, REVERENCE FOR GOD ABOVE ALL! It was that for which Jesus bowed his head on the Cross, and "sat down at the right hand of God."

There is an Infinite God! You and I owe allegiance to Him, and our service of Him is the keeping of every Law which He has made;—keeping it faithfully, earnestly, honestly. That is Religion, and to those who do it, on every thundering cloud which passes over their heads, He will cast his rainbow, girdling it with seven-fold magnificence of beauty, and on that cloud take them to His own Kingdom of Heaven, to be with Him forever and forever.